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**Committee on Conferences**
**Substantive session of 2000**

## Draft report

**Addendum**

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# III. Translation- and interpretation-related matters

## A. Use of remote interpretation

**Introduction and overview**

1. At its substantive session of 1999, the Committee on Conferences commended the efforts of the Secretariat to develop a system of remote interpretation and looked forward to additional experiments in the future. The Committee also requested the Secretariat to further refine the cost considerations of remote interpretation, taking into account not only technological possibilities but also the cost benefits of remote interpretation, including the relative cost advantages of the different conference centres that were likely providers of remote interpretation services, and to report thereon.

2. In its resolution 54/248, the General Assembly decided that, in the absence of an Assembly decision to the contrary, the use of remote interpretation would not constitute an alternative to the current institutionalized system of interpretation and that the use of remote interpretation should not affect the quality of interpretation or in itself lead to any further reduction in language posts, nor would it affect the equal treatment of the six official languages. The Assembly requested the Secretary-General to keep under review the introduction and use of any new technology, in particular remote interpretation, and to report thereon to the Assembly on a regular basis.

3. In his 1999 report on developments in the field of remote interpretation (A/54/176), the Secretary-General announced that an experiment involving the servicing from Geneva of a full-scale intergovernmental meeting, with six languages, to be held at Nairobi, would take place as early as possible in 2000.

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4. At its 429th meeting, on 7 August 2000, the Committee on Conferences considered the report of the Secretary-General on remote interpretation (A/55/134), which concerned the organization of the Geneva-Nairobi experiment.

5. The selection of the duty stations involved in the experiment was based on the availability of interpretation staff and vacant conference rooms equipped with interpretation booths at Geneva, as well as the possibility of enhancing the use of existing meeting facilities at Nairobi, where permanent interpreters were not yet posted.

6. Preparations for the experiment, involving extensive arrangements, started in early January 2000. By 14 March 2000, however, it had been concluded that it was not prudent to make substantial financial commitments or to undertake further technical and staffing preparations. A slippage of just a few days in any activity would mean that considerable resources would have been spent and the technical set-up would not have been in place for the experiment to take place between 8 and 12 May. In the absence of another scheduled meeting at Nairobi suitable for the experiment, preparations had been suspended.

**Discussion**

7. Understanding was expressed for the reasons that had forced the Secretariat to discontinue the experiment of servicing from Geneva a meeting held at Nairobi, and members expressed the hope that the Secretariat would not be discouraged from further efforts in that field.

8. Attention was drawn to the potential benefits to be derived from the introduction of remote interpretation at all duty stations, including the smaller centres, which could become both providers and recipients of the service.

9. It was suggested that consideration be given to the use of remote interpretation to alleviate the scarcity of interpretation resources at Headquarters, by resorting to evening teams working from European duty stations and to the use of remote interpretation for meetings of substantive bodies as well as regional groups.

10. The need to consider the possible hidden costs of remote interpretation was underlined and attention was drawn to the need to look at all aspects of the proposal, including the reality of the existing deficiencies in the technical capacities at some duty stations.

11. Additional information was sought with regard to the connectivity test that had been conducted in the last week in January 2000. The representative of the Secretariat explained that it had been a test of equipment and not of remote interpretation. The test had been designed to verify the compatibility of the sound transmitted via satellite with the sound installations in the conference rooms at the United Nations Office at Nairobi.

**Conclusions and recommendations**

**12. The Committee on Conferences took note of the report of the Secretary-General on remote interpretation (A/55/134) and requested the Secretariat to keep it informed of future activities in the field of remote interpretation.**

13. The Committee reiterated its understanding that the introduction of remote interpretation was not intended to replace traditional interpretation systems without the explicit approval of the General Assembly.

14. The Committee requested that future reports on the matter include an analysis of the cost of any proposed system and of its impact on the working conditions of interpreters.

15. The Committee recommended that remote interpretation should not be confined to specific duty stations, that each duty station should be considered both as recipient and provider and that the Secretariat should explore every opportunity for its introduction.